

Survey shows majority support planned strikes in France against pension reforms

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Protesters in the French capital, Paris, attend a demonstration against a deeply unpopular

Paris, March 8 (RHC)-- The majority of French citizens have expressed support for rolling strikes planned against President Emmanuel Macron's deeply unpopular pension reforms a new poll says. The results of poll by the Elabe survey group for the BFM news channel showed that a total of 56 percent of respondents backed rolling strikes against bitterly contested plans to reforms pensions and 59 percent said they supported the call to bring the European country to "a standstill."

It is expected that the new wave of strikes, scheduled to begin on Tuesday, will impact many sectors such as transport, energy and oil refining, and will be joined by teachers, gas and electricity workers and train drivers.

Unlike previous industrial actions, these strikes have no pre-arranged end date, and consequently, life in France could grind to a halt for days on end. The results of the poll showed that two in three people (64 percent) support the industrial action in general, aimed at forcing the government to drop its pension reforms plans.

Through his proposed reforms, Macron is pushing to raise the minimum retirement age from 62 to 64, saying it is vital if the country is to avoid the collapse of the state pension system.

Pushing back the retirement age by two years and extending the pay-in period would yield an additional 17.7 billion euros (\$19.18 billion) in annual pension contributions, allowing the system to break even by 2027, according to Labor Ministry estimates.

"We don't want French people to be, quote, unquote, 'victims' of a long-term blockade," government spokesman Olivier Veran told France 2 after warning last week that the strikes could lead to an "ecological, agricultural and health catastrophe."

"The history of protest movements in France shows that you don't have to block the whole country and cause such major inconveniences for people in their daily lives," he added. Unions, however, say there are other ways to do this, such as taxing the super-rich or asking employers or well-off pensioners to contribute more.

Unlike previous industrial actions, major confederations of French trade unions, including the CFDT and CGT, have announced that strikers will vote at the end of each strike day on whether to continue their protest.

"We always said that we would go into a higher gear if necessary. It will be the case on Tuesday," said the head of the influential CGT union, Philippe Martinez on Sunday.

Over 260 demonstrations are expected across France, with between 1.1 and 1.4 million people expected to fill the streets, AFP cited a an unnamed police source as saying. The pension reforms plan has been The French president's flagship policy of his second term in office as his country lags behind its neighbors and other major European economies where the retirement age has already been raised to 65 or above to reflect higher life expectancy.

Nevertheless, the results of the poll also showed that 64 percent of respondents thought the reforms would be enacted despite the crippling strikes, with the Senate currently debating the draft legislation.



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